



Chesapeake Bay Program

Science. Restoration. Partnership.

Maintain Healthy Watersheds GIT Meeting

February 12, 2024

11:00 am-1:00 pm

[Meeting Materials](#)

Kristin Saunders, UMCES
Melissa Harrison, PA DEP
Holly Walker, DE DNREC
Elise Turrietta, US EPA OWOW ORISE
Alison Santoro, MD DNR
Sam Eckert, MD DNR
Arianna Johns, VA DEQ
Kelly Maloney, USGS
Scott Heidel, PA DEP
Angel Valdez (Tier II), MDE
Sean Emmons, USGS
Sophie Waterman, CRC

Ashley Hullinger, PA DEP
Bonnie Bick - Mattawoman Watershed Society
Kara Kemmerer, MDE
Mark Hoffman, Chesapeake Bay Commission
Scott Stranko, MD DNR
Anne Hairston-Strang, MD DNR
Gina Hunt, MD DNR
Andrew Szwak, Land Trust Alliance
Jeff Lerner, EPA
Peter Claggett, USGS
Sarah McDonald, USGS

11:10 AM Upcoming Items of Interest- *Sophie Waterman, HWGIT Staffer, CRC*

Conferences

- [Watershed Steward Academy's Annual Conference](#)- March 9, 2024, Arundel Mills, Maryland.
- [Choose Clean Water Conference](#) – May 20-22, 2024, Ellicott City, Maryland. Proposals for presentations, workshops and field trips due January 12.
- [Chesapeake Community Research Symposium](#) – June 10-12, 2024, Annapolis, Maryland.
- [American Planning Association \(APA\) Virginia 2024 Conference](#) – July 21 – 24, 2024, Williamsburg, Virginia. Session Proposals due February 23rd.

Grants

- [Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense \(WILD\) Grants](#) – 2024 RFP is out. Full Proposal Due Date: April 10, 2024
- [Chesapeake Bay Small Watershed Grants](#)- Spring 2024 RFP is out. Full Proposal Due Date: Wednesday, April 3, 2024

11:15 AM Jurisdictional Call Summaries- *Peter Claggett, HWGIT Coordinator, USGS*

Peter discussed the jurisdictional calls that occurred over December and January and how they will impact our direction.

Questions that each jurisdiction was asked fell into three buckets: State-identified healthy watersheds, CHWA2.0, and the HWGIT as a whole. Peter reviewed each meeting, providing a summary of what was discussed. Most of the jurisdictions talked about protection work and its importance and found the HWGIT as a place to share ideas and information, but it could be more helpful (especially if we incorporate more joint meetings). The CHWA was not seen as a tool that would be used, but it has some potential.

Discussion:

Anne Hariston-Strang: CEASAR report and creation of a system response. How do we do the management that needs to be done within our delivery systems. Capacity is a big issue. How does this work connect to the nuts and bolts of our delivery systems.

Kristin Saunders (in chat): Anne, that is a fair question and part of what Jeff is going to talk about it how the small group on healthy watersheds has been talking to land conservation folks about the nexus to explore....

Jeff Lerner: The CHWA was created in part to help with tracking and accountability, not to create more work for jurisdictions.

Anne Hairston-Strang: the next step with the CHWA is the interpretation and what it means for MS4 permits or stream restoration.

Shane Kleiner: the CHWA should just be used as a model. The land use is helpful, but it doesn't tell the whole story for a state like PA; we have acid mine drainage issues. There are a lot of historical contexts that will limit the use of a tool like the CHWA.

Alison Santoro: How much outreach has been done for the CHWA? I do not make the management decisions; those who are doing the planning and making decisions are the ones you should be showing the CHWA tool to.

Peter Claggett: So, the tool should be used to help answer local planning management questions. Use case development.

Jeff Lerner: Key takeaways

- We need to broaden our efforts to engage those who are involved in land protection and land use planning.
- The CHWA doesn't provide the complete picture, but it is a piece.
- Making the HWGIT meetings more relevant and addressing jurisdictional needs.

Anne Hairston-Strang: What is our current engagement with the land trust community?

Peter Claggett: It is minimal, partially because we are not responsible for workgroups like protected lands. We have fractured the Bay Program, and that is something we need to overcome.

Steve Epting: Do any of the states within the HWGIT have structured engagement with groups doing the work within healthy watersheds? There is a mix of state organizations that attended these meetings, but not necessarily the ones that are moving the ball forward.

Sophie Waterman: That engagement piece has been brought up before. Having regional groups be a connection point for state organizations and those land trusts/ other NGOs who are doing the work.

Scott Heidel: The CHWA is one of the tools within the toolbox that can help identify areas of restoration. The top-down approach of BMP implantation is not working in PA, and we have moved to stringing BMPs in a concentrated manner within local watersheds. You don't start from the worst and work your way up; instead, start with something healthy or upstream and protect it and put in BMPs to keep it healthy.

Angel Valdez: in MD there are counties that want to work closely with MDE, but there is a capacity issue of having enough staff to help those counties. It is of great importance to protect their waters.

Kristin Saunders (in chat): Angel is there any capacity in the land conservation side of MD DNR that can add to your efforts at MDE?

Angel Valdez (in chat): Possibly, but again, having the capacity to engage those communities is difficult. Also, there are issues with the permitting aspect that many NGOs feel don't align with their mission. I was actually going to send an email to FCA staff regarding another question I had, so that would be perfect Anne

Cassie Davis: Cassie Davis and Lauren Townley attend the Upper Susquehanna Conservation Alliance (run by the USFW). They have a Landscape Conservation and Planning workgroup that is active, and works with land trusts and are interested in protection. Getting those types of folks on a HWGIT call can be difficult.

Andrew Szwak (in chat): Sorry to stay off-camera, I'm here. Talk about capacity issues... land trusts have an average of 1-2 staff and a \$150k budget. Although, it's their business to have (trusted) connections with landowners who are amenable to WQ BMPs (and the permanent protections to ensure they actually stay in place). I'm happy to help be a conduit, but as with others, can only do so much.

11:35 AM Beyond 2025 and Healthy Watersheds- Jeff Lerner, HWGIT Chair, EPA

Jeff shared the recommendations and directions from the Beyond 2025 Healthy Watersheds small group with the

HWGIT. These recommendations will be shared at the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee Symposium. The small group has a vision and vanguard that helped guide the recommendations:

Vision: We envision a more comprehensive and holistic approach to a healthy Chesapeake Bay watershed where protection, improvement, restoration, and stewardship actions are deployed strategically, achieve ecological function, and align with state and/or local priorities to meet Bay program goals.

Vanguard: Integrate a more holistic and locally-engaged approach to improving and maintaining watershed health as a foundational goal of the partnership.

Jeff then shared the recommendations:

- Utilize Data, Tools and Monitoring
- Engagement in Planning
- Local Engagement
- Goals for Watershed Actions
 - Land Protection
 - Restoration
 - Stewardship
- Accountability – Crediting (practices that are not related to sediment, nitrogen, or phosphorus)
- Integrate Habitat, Climate, and DEIJ into all recommendations.

After sharing the recommendations Jeff opened the floor.

Discussion

Scott Heidel (in chat): I wanted to also mention legacy sediment removal/floodplain restoration projects in karst watersheds. These are expensive but have gigantic positive outcomes, including climate resiliency with stable water temps, wetland restoration, etc.... The Limiting factor is money.

Scott Stranko(in chat): Impervious seems like that could be an important part of a/the message.... and/or how much BMP could or should be part of that?

Peter Claggett (in chat): Connecticut has a TMDL with a <12% effective impervious threshold.

12:10 PM Feedback on the Healthy Watersheds Framework- Sarah McDonald, USGS

Sarah presented on the development of the healthy watersheds framework and solicited feedback from the GIT. She reviewed the Healthy Watersheds Goal and Outcome, talked about the indicator action team, and extended thanks to those who participated. Sarah walked through the steps the action team took to create the indicator, sharing what each state uses to define their healthy watersheds and how EPA categorizes healthy watersheds.

Sarah noted that there are many different factors that can be considered when defining “healthy,” and for that reason, there is no one way to understand the health of the watershed. This makes creating an indicator really challenging, as there is no one way to track watershed health. The action team had to take a step back and ask what data do we have and what can be measured for monitoring purposes. The action team then identified available data/metrics that are considered indicators of watershed health. After ranking and discussing possibilities, the action team determined that protected lands, land use, and population density are important for understanding watershed health and can be measured for monitoring purposes. This led to the proposed indicator:

- Percent protected natural lands (forests and wetlands) in state-identified healthy watersheds
- Percent natural lands (forests and wetlands) in state-identified healthy watersheds*

*After the meeting, Sarah submitted a correction: This second bullet should have been percent impervious cover in state-identified healthy watersheds.

Sarah opened the floor for conversation.

Discussion

Jeff brought up the Open Space Institute, which recently put out a report on protecting forests for clean water. It might be worth looking at to see what metrics they are using. There are also other places around the country that have done similar work that might want to be looked into.

Anne noted that we want to make sure that we are looking at other natural landscape types, such as grasslands or uplands. Jeff noted that he hopes we take a comprehensive look at the intact parts of the landscape.

Angel Valdez noted that as long as there is a road for expansion, this is a great start. She also stated that there is a communication challenge that we need to make sure we address: jurisdictions all have different regulations/communications on healthy watersheds, and we need to make sure that we communicate this indicator correctly.

Sarah responded to Angel by emphasizing that the indicator, including the messaging, will be vetted. Sarah noted that we need to stress that these are just a part of health and that we are using them because they are consistently monitored.

The scale of the indicator was talked about, this indicator will be at the 1:24 K.

Andrew Szwak (in chat): Worth considering is a recent report by OSI about forest protecting & clean water impacts in the Delaware Watershed. Many relevant findings for this conversation: [Protecting Forests for Clean Water \(2024\) - Open Space Institute](#)

Scott Stranko (in chat): For Maryland, we use biology because biology integrates many other factors like water quality, habitat, land cover etc. As PA said, there could be forested land cover, but other factors are important (mine drainage was specifically mentioned).

Scott Stranko (in chat): Could also have a fairly large amount of natural land, but other land factors (impervious was mentioned earlier) would be important. Do certain BMPs (like buffers or stormwater management) help where natural land cover is less? Most studies show land cover throughout the catchment/watershed is often more important than the buffer. But, certainly forested buffers help, but how much?

12:30 PM **Introduction to the Revised Strategy Review System- *Sophie Waterman, HWGIT Staffer, CRC***

Sophie introduced the GIT to the recent changes made to the Strategy Review System's Fourth Cycle, discussing the SRS process, updated timelines, and materials needed for the process. The Strategy

Review System (SRS) is a structured process that applies adaptive management to the Chesapeake Bay Program's work toward the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. Sophie talked about the old vs new SRS and how it impacts our healthy watersheds outcome. In the old system, we had to speak to the Management Board every two years; there is now some more flexibility where outcomes can either meet every year or pass on an update. Sophie noted that because we have not been in front of the Management Board since 2021, we should take the time to do a full update on our outcome. In order to do a full update we must prepare the following documents:

Outcome Review Summary: This document helps the outcome prepare for the Quarterly Progress Meeting (QPM) and will provide the Management Board with the information they need to discuss progress toward our outcome.

An optional presentation: can be helpful in highlighting key topics for the MB.

After we meet with the MB in June, the GIT will create a two-year work plan (2024-2026) that will illustrate the link between the factors that could impact the partnership's ability to achieve our outcome and the actions it is taking to manage them. This is due in early fall.

We will also have the opportunity to update our management strategy, but Sophie noted we might want to hold off on that until 2025 as we may have a new Bay Agreement.

Sophie concluded the presentation with a timeline for the group. At our April meeting, we will " look back" over the last two years to understand how we have progressed and any factors that may be limiting us. We are meeting with the MB in June and will have the rest of the summer to create our new action plan for the next two years. The new action plan will be submitted to the MB in September.

Discussion:

Anne noted that the CESR report provides good context for the system's response. There should be a collaboration with the Protected Lands Workgroup, and we really need to reorient and encourage conservation. There is nothing in the TMDL that incentivizes land conservation. How do we build the incentive and get people to conserve land?

Sophie noted that idea is something that could be added to the new action plan, or something that we can workshop with the MB.

Anne noted that there are many national and international actions on this topic, and we should make sure we understand what is happening around the country to help inform how to implement more conservation within the watershed. We need to center the conversation at the MB to highlight CESR and land conservation.

Action: Look into land conservation work around the US and internationally to see how they are implementing programs and incentivizing the conservation of natural lands.

1:00 PM Adjourn